

The Challenge of Leadership

Brig Gen Robin Olds

Gentlemen, I am happy you asked me to participate in this “Frontiers of Leadership” program for a number of reasons. Although I do not possess advanced degrees, as many of you do, I feel that I have some relevant experience in this area. In our service they don’t give you degrees for your ability to exercise the intangibles of leadership; they give you ribbons.

There are a wide variety of leadership positions in our Air Force—positions of command, positions of staff, as well as very responsible positions such as agency, or staff head; I am referring to jobs that do not carry with them the authority to say, “So-and-so is appointed commander of X, Y, or Z outfit; so-and-so, relieved.” And for as many different positions as there are in our Air Force that call for somebody to be the “honcho,” there are so many different people who vary widely on an emotional, physical, educational, and experience basis who fill those jobs. So getting the right man-job match is extremely difficult, and I agree with Fiedler¹ that you can’t really compare kumquats and oranges. The proof of the pudding is whether the man gets the job done, not really in how he does it. This is certainly true from the military point of view.

I think our Air Force has come a tremendously long way in the past 25 years. On the question of leadership and command, the officers left over from World War II either proved themselves or got out of the service. I think we have matured as a service. I think the people that we have following along today are better men than were their predecessors, en masse.

I’ve been privileged to go to the Air University, to talk to the Air War College, the Air Command and Staff School, and the Squadron Officer School. Naturally, in talking to these different schools within the Air University, you pitch your talk at a slightly different level to each student body. But the difference is slight as they are all interested in and engaged in the same leadership problems. They are all part of the same organization; and by and large, they have a pretty good feel for what is going on. I found the younger officers full of questions, and darn good ones. The older men were a little more set in their ways, not quite as curious, more resigned to what is happening to them, and more

assured in the direction they want to go. I must say, many seemed pretty well aware of how far they can go, which in itself is a very interesting observation. I wondered why; but I am certainly not going to stand before this group and make an analysis because I haven’t come up with a good answer, certainly not an answer that wouldn’t be challenged immediately by you. So what I would like to do this morning is to talk a little about some of the theories of leadership as I see them as a practicing leader.

My qualifications for standing before you today are possibly the result of pure luck. Although I really don’t believe that, it establishes a nice degree of humility. I became a leader the easy way. I was one of the 40 young men that went over with a squadron in 1944 and joined the Eighth Air Force in fighters. I was one of the original 40 that joined the squadron; and by the time we were completing our first tour, there were only eight of us left. That made it pretty easy for me because in those days the personnel people had the lovely habit of promoting you, if you were qualified, into any vacancy that might arise. I went from assistant flight commander to squadron commander in something like eight months. That also meant that I went from first lieutenant to major too. Now you can call that luck if you like, but there was something that made me survive. There was also something that made me qualified to be chosen to command that squadron. That is the thing I can’t put into words, although I shall try a little later on.

Frankly, I was very grateful that the war ended when it did; otherwise the orders that had already been cut promoting me to lieutenant colonel might have been issued. Even at the tender age of 22, I had the good sense to realize that this was perfectly and absolutely ridiculous. So I went home knowing that I could do a job as a combat squadron commander; and believe me, it wasn’t all just flying. I was responsible for a little more than I am responsible for today, namely mess, discipline, transportation, maintenance, personnel, and so on. In those days the squadron commander had it all. He even had his own communications section.

That may give you pause for thought, gentlemen; but it is quite true. As a 22-year-old major I had more authority than I do today as a 47-year-old brigadier general—more direct authority. If a man goofed, zap! You took away a stripe or two. On the other hand, if he performed well and you had a vacancy, you promoted him. Fiedler covered this in different words in his article. He called it authoritarian—he didn’t use the word dictatorship, but he almost said it—which, to him, typifies the military in a combat situation.

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To get to the meat of the thing this morning, I want to say that I disagree partially with Fiedler. I think the words that he has used here are just jim-dandy, fine; however, he sets up the situation and then proves his theory—and it just ain't that way! You can't take a high LPC (score on the Least-Preferred Co-worker scale) and a low LPC and say this is it! The one score means the individual is an authoritarian; and the other means that he is a democratic sort of laissez-faire, free-rein type of leader. I would flunk the test. I feel that Fiedler has established a situation which is all black on the one hand and all white on the other. I would suggest that when he is here, you people challenge him to study the Air Force leader. He focuses on two clusters of behavior and attitudes. One is labeled autocratic, authoritarian, task-oriented; and the other is labeled democratic, permissive, and group-oriented. He says the first type is frequently advocated in conventional supervisory and military systems. Of course, he qualifies it when he says "frequently." He doesn't say "always." I realize this, but I suggest to you that it just isn't that simple. For instance, he talks about leadership behavior and leadership style. The former is how the leader engages in directing others—or specific acts, that is, how much consideration he gives his subordinates, what praise, what kicks. This is leadership behavior, and the style seems to be "Why he does what he does." In other words, what is his basic motivation—to step on others? Is he task-oriented or group-oriented? It is more complex than that. It just isn't that simple. In my estimation, gentlemen, a good leader combines all of these—and more!

Fiedler goes on to say that the high LPC is relationship-oriented, has close personal relationships with members of the group. A low LPC on this test is task-oriented. He will step on anybody, and he gets his kicks out of getting the job done successfully. I don't quarrel with the words, but it is shallow—because a good leader combines the two. You've got to relate to your people. You get your satisfaction from the knowledge of having successfully performed the task assigned to you with the resources given but in order to do it successfully, you must relate to people.

Fiedler seems to say in no uncertain terms that experiments comparing the performance of both types of leader have shown that each is successful in some situations and not in others. I don't quarrel with that. No one has been able to show that one kind of leader is superior or more effective. But when he gets down to the point that leaders are not born and that anyone can become a leader—if he learns which types of situations are favorable to his personal leadership style and chooses to exert leadership in these situations—I can't buy that. Again, this is putting forth a situation and then working around it to prove that it is true. In the first instance, I don't quarrel that leaders are not born. I would like to say that perhaps they are lucky, that they've got something. They do have something; they've had the finger put on them. Because how many men have the opportunity to take advantage of situations favorable to their personal leadership style? Well, perhaps it's the guy whose daddy owns 52 percent of the stock in the company. He's got time to go to

school and learn how to be a leader in that situation, but God help him if the company merges with another one. He's out.

Look at the people in the Air Force. Look at yourselves, gentlemen. What are you asked to do? You are asked to lead in peacetime, and you are asked to lead in wartime. You are asked to lead in the Pentagon; you are asked to lead on an air-drome; you are asked to lead on the mountain that has a radar station on it. In short, you are asked to lead in every conceivable type of situation except the one in which you have absolute authority, because you don't have it in the Air Force.

I have journeyed too far afield and into too many things that I know little about. I merely wanted to say these things to you to give you my reactions to a very well-written article and one that gave me pause for a lot of thought.

Another thing in your outline that caught my imagination was your attempt to teach the cadets an understanding of formal versus informal authority. I envy you every moment of the classroom time you spend with cadets discussing subjects like this because they are fascinating. Formal versus informal authority—that is really the greatest trick of the century nowadays—to fulfill a command position and to understand the limits of your formal authority and the horizons of your informal authority.

I mentioned a few moments ago that as a 22-year-old major I had more direct authority than I have today as a brigadier general, and that is true by any standard of measurement. Formal authority has been stripped from today's commanders. You must perform and command within the confines of a shelf full of regulations, a room full of manuals, and a warehouse full of technical orders. And this is to say nothing of the ever-present and ever-watchful eye of the inspector general, staff judge advocate, and the local director of personnel. You just do not possess the degree of formal authority oftentimes essential to the performance of your mission.

For instance, what are the inherent responsibilities of command or leadership? It used to be that first you fed your horse, then you fed your men, and then you looked out for yourself. These are pretty good words really. Translated into today's vernacular it means that given a mission, given the resources, and the facilities, a leader must first concern himself with the training, the welfare, the care (blankets, beds, building, beans), and the morale and the discipline of his troops. If they lack in any of three aspects, you cannot perform the mission. You can continue to launch attacks on Hill 307 as long as you've got two men left. You can't launch the first attack with a full platoon if your men aren't properly trained, disciplined, and of good spirits, and properly led. So this is the first inherent responsibility of a leader.

Does this call for an authoritarian or a democratic, free-rein type? I'm not sure the question is even a relevant one because it doesn't matter who has the job or what his leadership style is, he still has these responsibilities. How does he react to them? How does he react when he finds that his lack of formal authority—which, believe me, is absolutely essential in secur-

ing the right reaction from his troops—works horribly against him? He relies heavily on informal authority.

For instance, how does he deal with discipline problems? You cannot properly, quickly, and with complete impartiality discipline a recalcitrant. I've always tried to tell any subordinate commander I ever had working for me that you don't punish the culprit for his own good; you punish him for the good of the command. The men in your unit, collectively and individually, demand justice. Anyone who gets away with something, believe me, is a chink in your armor, is a chink in your authority, is a chink in your image.

It used to be that a commander could put a man in the pokey for a week, even the officer of the day could do that. He can't do that anymore. Now it takes the approval of a major force commander. In the meantime this guy and his acts have wrought a pernicious influence on the good of the command.

Now I didn't mean to rant and rave about our lack of formal authority, but I am saying that what it does is place supreme emphasis on informal authority. By informal authority, I don't mean circumventing regulations, or the Uniform Code of Military Justice. But you do have to play your game; you have to exercise your leadership; and you have to command in a very different way. I want to make it very clear right here and now that I am not saying this lack of formal authority is bad. As a matter of fact, I think it is rather good because it has, in our service, tended to eliminate the absolute autocrat, the guy who has no qualifications other than the insignia on his shoulders, the man who does not fit any definition of a leader. It has made people use their wits and their ingenuity, and I think it has brought to the surface (please, I am not speaking personally) the very best in our Air Force officers because it is a challenge to command with these difficulties placed in your way.

Now what is informal authority? Well, for one thing, informal authority is the word that goes around the base. Usually the commander is surprised at the authoritative value placed upon as simple a thing as his name spoken by someone else. Now that may not be his given name or his surname. It could be the "old bastard," or the "old man," or the "chief," or the "boss," or whatever you choose to call him; but there is a very definite aura of authority associated with the commander's name.

You will find, for example, the technical sergeant who is the chief warehouseman will exhort his workers to greater efforts in stocking, binning and recording, and keeping the place policed up by using your name. He'll say, "The old man is coming around tomorrow; now get with it." Boy, zap, zap, zap, everybody gets with it. The same thing with getting a mission off. The bird isn't ready; and according to normal procedures that are all laid down in stacks of books telling you how to do it, it would take two days to get that aircraft back in commission. So the supervisor says to the Indians, "Men, we need this bird for tomorrow night's mission. The old man just told me so, and I think he is going to fly it himself." And zap, zap, zap, it's ready; and off it goes!

Now we could go on for a long time talking about this informal authority. Believe me, it is an all-pervasive force within a

command. How many times here at the Academy have you heard "The superintendent said . . ."? How many times have you questioned that statement? Who said he said? Did you hear him? Nope. You may never find the source. It could be Dick Davis.* He knows what the superintendent thinks. He doesn't say, "He said." He says, "The superintendent sort of likes it this way." By the time it floats down here and over to your shop, "The superintendent said." Right? It's true.

Now I don't want to preach at you; all I'm doing is recognizing the fact that informal authority does exist. And it is very, very important! But as a corollary, it is absolutely essential that the man who is in a position of command understand informal authority. It can be horribly abused by ambitious staff officers and subordinates. It can get you into trouble faster than anything I know. It also places the requirement upon you to recognize that this is happening and to be prepared to take advantage of it. Recall the warehousemen who really had the place in beautiful shape; they were proud of it. You know it's because of *you* they did it. They did not do it because they like to put little boxes on shelves and write a lot of numbers on a card that goes into a machine. They did it for you. So, by golly, you had better make sure you go around there and look at it and find a little bit wrong with it if you possibly can and just praise the hell out of them. And do this as a regular practice everywhere in your command—everywhere.

Of course, you realize I am talking about something as simple as a military command. Last year I was asked to talk to a businessmen's executive club meeting at Scottsdale, Arizona. I was very flattered to address this group of gentlemen. The night before I read very carefully the brochures and the autobiographies of each of the men in attendance. They made no bones about it. There was a pecking order, and the worth of each of the industries or companies was right there in black and white. One man would have a company worth \$25 million. There was another one there worth \$500 million, which I thought was pretty interesting. So I sat down that evening and tried to figure out the worth, the intrinsic value, of a fighter wing. The more I pondered, the more things I thought of on that base for which I had really been responsible. When I stood up to give them my talk, I informed them of what the firm I had just run was worth; and I gave them the round figure number. They laughed when I reported my executive salary. That set the stage for my thirty-minute speech.

I would like to try to get down to the specifics of leadership instead of generalizing. I am just going to say what I feel, and you can tear it apart. Instead of talking to you about the principles of leadership or the techniques, or theory, I want to tell you a little about the practice. Even this is a very difficult subject.

Your effectiveness in a position of command is determined by you, plus your mission, your situation, where you are, the status of the unit that you take over, and the circumstances that prevail. Remember, it's you plus these factors. You must adapt yourself, even your personality, to suit what's needed

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from you or of you as a commander. Having assessed this hurdle, maybe intuitively, maybe objectively, the next thing you had better do is find out all you can about your people, individually and in work groups or task groups. How is their morale? How effective are they? Do they work well together? Have you got any problem areas? Remember that it is your personality and even your reputation that they are now going to look at very closely. In order to accomplish the mission, as a boss you've got to have a lot of guts, or courage, or faith—anything you want to call it; it all equates to the same thing.

You have to have the courage of your convictions. You have to have the courage, the faith, and the guts to delegate authority. You have to have the courage and the fortitude to punish, when punishing is necessary—and you had better understand exactly when it is necessary and act swiftly. You have to have the good sense to praise when praise is due. You have to have the guts to exercise authority that frankly may not even exist; but if you act like it does, you exercise it. You have to have the courage to allow your subordinates a lot of swinging room because when you assign that responsibility, you have to delegate some authority. Unless you make that subordinate *feel* responsible for the job that he is doing and give him the authority to do it, the job may not get done. He is going to make mistakes; he might get your neck in a sling, so to speak. But you, in my estimation, are next to nothing as a leader if you don't give your people a job and say, "O.K., now go do it. Here is what you need to do it with—here are the people, the facilities, and the resources."

By the same token, you have to supervise, you have to manage, you have to watch. Don't stand on their toes. That's a terrible mistake, because you might just as well do it yourself. Believe me, if any one man thinks he is as smart as a whole collection of people, he is out of his mind.

I want to explain one of the techniques I have used in taking over a flying outfit because I could get away with it (I don't pretend that I measure up to what I am about to say, but some of you in the audience may not know the difference). In Thailand I had never been in combat in an F-4. So I just told the truth—gathered them all in and said, "O.K., I'm new. I haven't the vaguest idea what's going on here; and I expect you men to teach me, every one of you. That goes for the supply officer, the electronics officer, the communications officer, the engineering officer, materiel guys, club officer, special services, every one of you. You are going to teach me, and I'll fly 'green 16'* until I know as much about your job as you do. And when I know as much about your job as you do, look out because then I start getting nasty, terribly arrogant, and superior. I may even tell you how to do your job, so just stay ahead of me. Make sure you know more about it than I do."

Then you follow up. You had better, by golly, go around and have each guy tell you what he does and why and what his purpose is; and then ask him, "How do you fit into the whole?" The special services man probably never thought

about it that way, or the club officer, or the motor pool maintenance officer, or the dispatcher in base operations. What you are doing is starting to mold them and weld them together. Each one feels that there is not a wheel that rolls down the runway that isn't his direct interest and something that he contributed to directly. Boy, if you can get those troops to feeling that way, you've got them. And it isn't difficult really, providing the circumstances are right.

What are some of the qualities that a leader should have? Mind you, I am speaking from a very limited background so my remarks are oriented a little bit more toward operations than they are toward other aspects of our services. By failing to cover the whole broad spectrum, I'm not ignoring anybody; I just plead ignorance.

What qualities must a leader have? I think he must have bearing (these are all written down; I didn't think of them), courage, decisiveness, dependability. You know all of these things: enthusiasm, initiative, judgment, integrity, a sense of justice, knowledge, loyalty, tact, unselfishness. You know them because they're right out of the dictionary, right out of the manual. You better have a whole lot of all of these and a tremendous amount of some of them. Any failings that you have as a personality, a human being, in any one of these qualities, you better cover up with a plethora of capability in the others.

Some men think that to be a good leader you have to be popular. This is so fallacious that it is absolutely unbelievable. Any man who thinks this way is doing the Air Force and himself a disservice. You are not running a popularity contest. You are there to command a unit, to perform a mission. It takes every man in the unit to perform that mission, including you as a catalytic agent. After you have taken care of your equipment and your facilities, *then* know your mission. Whatever the situation demands, you better make sure that you maintain good order and discipline through whatever talents you have. You train those men, equip them, house them, feed them, motivate and lead them. You must instill discipline, the right kind of discipline, and a high sense of duty and personal and individual responsibility. Willing obedience, not obedience through fear, stems from spirit, pride, and morale. If you do these things, I'll guarantee that you'll perform your mission well.

Each man in your unit, I said earlier, must feel that his job is necessary. I submit to you that a leader, whether he be in industry, in the Air Force, or in any other place, must make sure that everyone knows exactly where he fits and that he is necessary to the output of the whole. Sometimes your actions in this respect will be grossly misunderstood and misrepresented. Let me give you an example.

At my base in SEA I made it a rule that any man who was lucky and shot down a MiG would come back down that runway and do a roll on his return. This wasn't fighter pilot bravura as some people thought. I didn't make the rule for the benefit of the pilot. I didn't want to satisfy a childish inclination for showing off, a "Hey, look at me." I did it for every airman on that base, because I wanted to make sure each airman

* Last aircraft in the formation.

felt that that victory was his. It reached the point where, after a good mission, almost every airman on that base came down to greet the returning aircraft because he wanted to, because he was part and parcel of that mission and felt it in his heart.

I would like to talk a little bit about loyalty. This is a very difficult trait of leadership for some. When I speak of loyalty, I mean loyalty first to something that is almost passé in many circles today, loyalty to country, the symbolism of your flag, the meaning of your oath of commission to protect and defend the Constitution, not the president, nor the secretary of defense, nor even the chief of staff—the Constitution. That's your oath. That's where your loyalty lies. It's loyalty to your country, to everything it stands for, everything it is today and everything it better be in the future. That is what you are fighting for—working for. You've got to believe in everything that is good and hate everything that is bad. Of course, you make that choice yourself. You can't go wrong, far wrong, by listening to the chaplain a little bit and the dictates of your own conscience, your own upbringing, and your own heritage.

You must give loyalty to those above you—that means loyalty also to the men on the staff in the headquarters just above you. I don't mean a kind of deliberate, calculating, "What's in it for me" type of loyalty to those hard-working staff types, I mean *full* loyalty. Get to know them as people and work with them, not against them. If you don't, you have made one of the biggest mistakes you can make in your career. Sure they are all idiots, but so are you. They are hard-pressed, dedicated, wonderful guys, working under a situation of stress that you, the commander, sometimes can't even appreciate.

In one outfit over in SEA, loyalty was purely internal. This was fostered by the commander and his staff. The men of that wing were told they were the best, the bravest, and the smartest. Everyone else was wrong; they were always right. No one else could do the job as well as they. This was common knowledge in the whole unit. Didn't they tell themselves constantly that this was so? Therefore, it had to be right. They owed loyalty to no one but themselves. Such mass ego-pumping is not uncommon, but it is always dangerous in any organization and almost invariably leads to serious trouble. In this instance, the unit hushed up a monumental goof, to the ultimate embarrassment and international discredit of our government, and all because of a warped sense of loyalty.

One other subject I would like to discuss with you just briefly is the process of taking over another unit on any level. A few minutes ago I talked about the popularity business, and then I trailed off on another subject. I would like to return to it.

The first thing a new commander must do—the new officer boss or whatever—is to get the attention of his people. He can do it in a lot of different ways. First, he must assure job output—mission accomplishment, mission capability, or whatever you want to call it. If he is not sure that the unit he has taken over can handle this task and is fully capable, then he should shore it up. This is the attention-getting step. By doing this, he is going to earn respect or hatred, depending upon his personality and methods. He may be thoroughly

hated, but he could care less about that. As long as he is fair and has the other traits of judgment, unselfishness, and so on that we discussed earlier, this will earn him respect; and out of respect, gentlemen, will come loyalty. He may still be disliked, but I doubt it. He's got that loyalty. Once he's got loyalty, it's a "piece of cake." He has obedience that is willing and spirited. He has to hold them down now, not kick them. He has built good morale and high spirit, and everybody absorbs that "can do" attitude.

Popularity is the last attribute a leader should ever seek. It is the least important; and if improperly placed on the priority list, it can certainly be the most damaging. All of you know that you have to be consistent. You have to praise when praise is needed and correct when corrections are called for.

A leader also has other responsibilities, and these are to his subordinate leaders. A good leader ensures that the people to whom he passes authority and responsibility properly fulfill their roles in turn. He works with them to be sure they are properly oriented toward their mission and job, that they are fully aware of all the facilities and means available for accomplishing that mission, and that they receive the assistance they need to do the job.

You have to demand of your officers, for instance, adherence to standards. If you see an officer walking down the street and an airman does not salute that officer and the officer doesn't do anything about it, I suggest you walk up to that officer and say, "What the hell's the matter with you? Didn't you see that airman fail to salute you? Why didn't you do something about it?" If he answers, "Well, I don't know," then you had better get rid of him, because he is not on your "ball team." He let that airman down, and he let him down badly in a military organization. I suggest the same thing is true in a corporate setup where men fail to say good morning or fail to follow the normal courtesies of human relationships.

What I'm saying here, gentlemen, is that you can't let your subordinates, the officers, and NCOs give up their own sense of responsibility in their positions of leadership. They can't pass the buck up to you. You've got to keep that "buck" well spread. In spite of the fact that there is a dearth of formal authority backing the movement of each of your subordinates in the chain of command, you've got plenty of informal authority.

I suggest also that a leader must be a leader whatever his job may be, and this is where I perhaps quarrel a little bit with Fiedler. He makes it too easy—it's too much this way or too much that way. Each of us knows in the military we have a wide variety of jobs, and any one of them may fall our lot. If we rip our knickers in any one of them, we are never going any further in the Air Force. So the great challenge to the military man is to be a "jack of all trades" and good in everything. Our system is designed to make allowances for the fact that we do have this variety of jobs. How, I don't know. I'm not sure it was even thought out, but it is built in. The system makes allowances. This can be illustrated in an assignment to the Pentagon.

When you report to the Pentagon, you are given time to learn your job. You go through the three stages. First, you are a “polyp,” then you are a “raging bull,” and finally you become an “elder statesman.” Nobody expects any thing out of you in the “polyp” stage—not even where the nearest men’s room is located. Leaders in the Pentagon know that it takes time to learn the ropes; and when you get to the “raging bull” stage, they make allowances for that also, in most cases. I know this system motivated me. I moved from the basement to the joint staff. When you are an “elder statesman,” you’ve really got it made; and you can count on having three or four tours there during your career.

What are the things that you the leader must try to be? I suggest that a good leader must be his own severest critic. You know it if you are leading well. You know it if you are doing a good job. But if you ever think that “you’ve got it made,” if you ever think that everything you are doing is just absolutely apple pie and ice cream, then it’s time for you to move on.

If you are doing the job well, don’t be afraid of the ideas of your subordinates, or be afraid to admit it when it is perfectly obvious that you’ve made a mistake. Admit it any way you like. You don’t have to admit it openly, but let them know that you know you goofed. With their help you can pull yourself out of it. I guess what I’m trying to say is that you’ve got to be authoritarian, and yet you’ve got to be democratic. You’ve got to use people, but you’ve got to be human. You’ve got to know your job, which means you’ve got to know your subordinates’ jobs to the best of your ability. If you know their jobs, they’ll be more interested in them.

Finally, I think you must be psychologically prepared to fail along the way and to get “hung,” because in the final analysis that’s what the leader is for. He’s the scapegoat because he’s responsible. When you take on that position of command and walk grandly onto the base and see your name and title plastered on a sign out in front of headquarters, get down on your knees and ask for a little guidance and a little help because you’re going to need it. I guarantee those of you who take over that squadron, that air base group, or that wing—or any job where a piece of paper says you are the commander—I guarantee that within the first month your accident rate is going to go up. It never fails to happen. I guarantee that your incident rate and your disciplinary rate are going up too. I guarantee that some clod is going to run a truck over the commanding general’s staff car, or some idiot is going to prang one of your airplanes. I guarantee it! So you better be prepared. You had better know these things are going to happen and be prepared the day you arrive. I know; I’ve had all of these experiences.

I pity the man who takes over a squadron or a wing that has an unblemished accident record stretching back for three and one-half years. I wouldn’t want a job like that for anything in this world. In the first place, there is no such thing. There were some things going on in that wing that were wrong. There must have been some slightly shady reporting—some little

cover-up. The systems that were in effect because of the forceful personality of the outgoing leader are going to fall apart when he leaves. So in you come, thinking how wonderful it is that you finally are going to command your own wing. The first thing you know you are going like this (down) because the airplanes are falling out of the sky, and all sorts of other things are happening.

I can’t close without something being said about the rewards that come from being a commander. The greatest reward you can have is when you have severely disciplined a young fellow (you’re a 29-year-old lieutenant colonel, commanding a little base), and this guy is a bad apple. O boy, is he a bad apple; and you very severely disciplined him. You are way out in the boonies, so your methods of discipline are a little bit different when the inspector general is not sitting there looking at you. When his enlistment is up and this young man is about to leave, he storms his way into your office and stands there with tears in his eyes and thanks you for what you did for him. He’s going home now, and he’s going to be a far better man for the four years he has just spent in the service. Gentlemen, that’s when you get a lump in your throat and you realize what leadership is all about.

You taxi out on a mission for which you have been preparing for a couple of weeks, and you note the overtime work of the guys that have already been working ten hours a day for seven days a week. One bird is sick—but the airman is determined it’s going to go. He doesn’t know where or why or when, but it’s going to go. He’s out there for something like damn near forty hours without sleep working on that airplane of his. So when you taxi out, he’s lying on that hot concrete under the blazing noonday sun with his head on a wooden wheel chock, out, dead to the world, absolute exhaustion; but his bird has gone. And his bird knocked down a MiG-21 that day too. That’s a reward of leadership, gentlemen.

You see all the heartache, all the responsibility, and all the frustrations have not been in vain. You see that everything falls right into place, and you are a happy man. You have all the rewards and all the success that you could possibly ask for as a leader.

The moment comes when you have to depart a job. The situation is charged with emotion because you are a pretty emotional type, as much as you didn’t want the guys to know it. They give you a parade, and the airmen come running across the ramp just to shake your hand, to say goodbye. And, buddy boy, if you don’t have to go to the men’s room at the club when the guys carry you in on their shoulders and hide from them for 15 minutes or so, you aren’t human. Those are the rewards of leadership.

Notes

1. Fred Fiedler, “Style or Circumstance—The Leadership Enigma,” *Psychology Today*, March 1969.